

Del. 1 opens after minor hitches

Southbound autos roll on second phase of highway

**By CHIP GUY
and PRASHANT GOPAL**
Staff reporters

After nearly \$99 million and three years of construction, southbound motorists along the often-snarled U.S. 13 corridor can leave behind traffic jams in southern New Castle County.

Motorists took their first ride Monday afternoon along the newest stretch of the Del. 1 relief route, a road that promises to ease congestion in the growing area.

State police and highway crews opened the southbound lanes of the new toll road about 12:30 p.m. A rolling roadblock looked like the lead lap of a NASCAR Winston Cup race at Dover Downs as it ushered cars and trucks along the 11 miles of concrete highway from the Chesapeake & Delaware Canal to the Appoquinimink River.

"Here they come," one

highway worker said as police cars and turnpike trucks, their lights flashing, showed the way.

Monday's opening of the southbound lanes marked the first major highway unveiling for the state Department of Transportation in nearly six years. The last highway the state opened was the first phase of the Del. 1 relief route between Dover and Smyrna in 1993.

This new section is the second of three phases that will create a nearly \$1 billion toll road running about 42 miles from near the Christiana Mall to Dover Air Force Base.

Construction on the third link, between Odessa and Smyrna, will begin in the spring and be completed by 2003.

Crews opened only the southbound lanes of Del. 1 because work is not finished on the northbound lanes. Tie-ins between the toll road and U.S. 13, the road Del. 1 was designed to bypass, still have



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Police cars and turnpike trucks lead the way for the first motorists on the second phase of Del. 1 Monday. They are heading south near Boyds Corner.

to be finished. The tie-ins will allow motorists to avoid the Del. 1 tolls.

Southbound U.S. 13 will not be accessible from the Del. 1 bridge over the canal until the new tie-ins are completed next month. In the meantime, traffic will have to continue south on Del. 1 and access any local services through the Boyds Corner or Del. 299 interchanges.

Northbound lanes will open in about a month, and tolls for both directions of the road will go into effect.

Throughout the morning, road crews rushed about the highway like stagehands preparing for the opening of a show. They began moving barriers and putting down asphalt at 7 a.m., hoping to get the road ready for a noon opening.

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